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The Commonweal

CHRISTMAS BOOKS

December 1, 1950

HOLLYWOOD

Paradise Enslaved

JAMES RORTY

The Lost Audience

EMMET LAVERY

Reviews by HELENE ISWOLSKY • G. B. HARRISON
SERGE HUGHES • GEORGE MILES • MAX FISCHER
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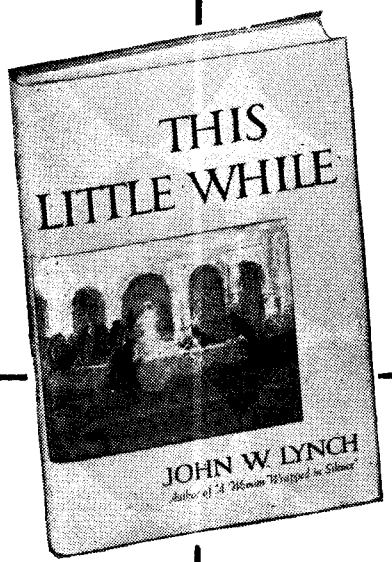

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The Commonweal

WEEK BY WEEK

Simple Equation

THE pseudo-religious trappings of Communism have long been ironically evident—the theological rather than philosophical method of Dialectic Materialism, for instance, the sanctification of Marxist scriptures, the reverence for the Fathers of the Revolution, canonization of martyrs and heroes, anathematizing of heretics and backsliders, the fabulous ardor of apostles, the mystical dedication of convinced followers, etc. Right down the line the analogy applies, and if you want to make a game out of it, you can match the letters the way it is done on a Stanford-Binet test.

There was nothing strikingly new about Bertrand Russell's use of ecclesiastical language to describe the evils of Communism in his recent Columbia University lecture. But because the distinguished mathematician went on to argue by analogy, in a widely publicized speech, someone should say a word for essences now, for the way Russell talked two things that are essentially different were made to look like the same thing.

Mr. Russell said these were the things that nade Communism evil:

> Adherence to a rigid and static system of doctrine, of which part is doubtful and part demonstrably false; persecution as a means of enforcing orthodoxy; a belief that salvation is only to be found within the Church and that the True Faith must be spread by force if necessary; that the priesthood, which alone has the right to interpret the Scriptures, has enormous power, physical east of the Iron Curtain and spiritual over the faithful *in partibus*; that this power is used to secure an undue share of wealth for the priesthood at the expense of the rest of the population; and that bigotry, and the hostility that it engenders, is a potent source of war.

Then he got where he was going. "Every one of these evils was exhibited by the Catholic Church when it had power, and would probably be exhibited again if it recovered the position it had in the Middle Ages. It is therefore irrational to suppose that much would be gained if, in the defeat of Communism, Catholicism were enthroned in its place."

Now in this statement Bertrand Russell, we submit, is guilty of almost criminal oversimplification. Take his first "evil," adherence to a system of doctrine. For the Catholic a doctrine is a supernatural truth either directly or inferentially made known by divine revelation. Medieval Catholicism produced a Thomas Aquinas who was largely concerned with showing that the doctrines of the Church were *not* demonstrably false. He dodged no objections, ran away from no arguments as Mr. Russell could learn from even a cursory look at the *Summa*. Can anyone imagine the equivalent of a medieval disputation in Russia today? Starting from their very notion of what truth is and its source, there are profound differences between a Thomas Aquinas and a J. Danhov. This difference Mr. Russell chose to ignore. It is enough for him that they are both concerned with dogma.

SOMETIMES Mr. Russell couples a genuine teaching of Catholicism with an abuse by Catholics, a betrayal of their own belief, as when he joins "belief that salvation is only to be found in the True Faith and must be spread by force if necessary." As anyone knows who was reading American newspapers a couple of years ago, a Catholic who would interpret the "no salvation outside the Church" dictum as narrowly as Russell implies would be in heresy. There are profound and inescapable differences between a Catholic's belief in the Church's uniqueness and a Communist's servile allegiance to the Party. These differences too Mr. Russell ignores.

It has always been contrary to Catholic teaching that the True Faith could be spread by force. Conquest camouflaged as religion has be-

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• NEXT WEEK •

LEO J. TRESE, in reviewing C. Virgil Gheorghiu's novel, *The Twenty-Fifth Hour,* calls the author "a man innocently caught and crushed between the millstones of Eastern and Western ideologies." The novel gives expression to European disillusionment with both East and West, and it ends with World War III, which Gheorghiu sees as "a clash between two categories of robots, each dragging in its wake a trail of slaves of flesh and blood."

smirched the history of Christendom, but there were never those lacking who condemned it in the very name of Catholicism. To equate the heroic missionaries of history, to whom Mr. Russell as an Englishman owes his own debt, with the imperialists of Russia, is to misrepresent and oversimplify more than even a popular lecturer should.

Again there were never lacking Catholics, in all ages, to condemn priestly wealth, nepotism and every kind of abuse, and they did it in the name of Catholicism too. Would Joe Stalin tolerate a Catherine of Siena who plagued the Pope with letters of reproach while she passionately revered his holy office? When Bertrand Russell equates the religious concept of a divine priesthood with the political gangsterism of the Kremlin, he is surely overdoing it.

One could go over these points one by one to show the differences that Russell's airy analogy ignores. But then, of course, the argument couldn't be summed up in a paragraph. In this instance, Mr. Russell rivalled Paul Blanshard himself in reducing the scholarship, tradition and history of 2,000 years to a phrase between semicolons. It is the kind of nimble oversimplification that reduces a Catholic to sputtering when patient and necessarily lengthy examination is impossible.

The important thing here is to assure Mr. Russell that he is unnecessarily perturbed. It is most unlikely that the Catholic Church will again occupy the place it held in the Middle Ages. For one reason, because civilization can never return to a Middle Age, even aside from the question of mass conversion. The Western World, including Mr. Russell's England, did not leap from the darkness of Druidism to the beneficent enlightenment of the Columbia campus. Mr. Russell and those who applauded him owe more to the Medieval Church than they may think.

Peiping's Mission to the UN

BEFORE the Chinese Communist delegation arrived at the UN, there was plenty of guessing about the nature of the demands and protests they intended to make there.

At the UN itself both Formosa and Korea were slated to be subjects of discussion. But it is doubtful whether Mao has empowered his representatives themselves to carry on much in the way of negotiations.

The Chinese Communists have a number o

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grand political objectives. They want to take over the island of Formosa without having to fight for it. They want a voice in the Japanese and Korean settlements. They want membership in the UN and one of the Big Five seats on the Security Council. They not only want all the Yalu River power installations kept out of Korean hands, but they would like to see all UN troops withdrawn from Korea.

First on the list of American objectives is noninvolvement in a war with Communist China. We want peace restored to the Far East, and Korea reunited, politically reorganized and rehabilitated. We want to conclude peace with Japan. We want the independent nations of Asia to be self-governing, prosperous, strong.

That is why we oppose Mao's and Stalin's larger political objectives. Whatever concessions we do make about the power installations on the Manchurian border or a buffer strip along the Yalu must reflect not our weakness but our strength. Agreement on the principle of independence for all Korea (with withdrawal of troops when all is secure) must stem from a determination to hold on until Korea is thriving and well defended.

What if all the concessions the United States is prepared to make should prove insufficient? That need not necessarily result either in real appeasement of Mao or in war. There could simply be a continuing failure to reach an agreement. Having taken a stand in Korea, the UN can neither throw away the fruits of its costly military victory nor give in to the pressure which Mao has exerted by seizing Tibet, stepping up aid to the Communists in Indo-China and sending thousands of his own troops into North Korea. For once the UN has backed down under a show of force, it will have forfeited the confidence of men and nations who now look to it as a bulwark of law, of justice and of world peace.

The Cry of the Hunter

THERE is an old Republican (yea, American) watchword: hang on to a good thing. Senator Joe McCarthy, possibly surprised himself at the havoc he wrought in Wisconsin, Maryland, Iowa, California, has recognized the good thing he's got. Senator McCarthy has just said that he is going to force re-opening of the investigation of Communists in the Administration. Republicans who have tasted blood cried out in approval.

So Senator McCarthy rides again, and God protect any administration Democrat who even looks like he's left-handed.

A competent and impartial investigation would not be objectionable, since the government obviously has been the target of spies and since proof of espionage has been established in the courts. But another McCarthy-type attack *is* objectionable, because the Senator's tactics are completely irresponsible. And his supporters are not making much effort to hide their political motives. This is, in our judgment, demagoguery; a shameless, ruthless exploitation of innuendo that may yet rip apart the fabric of our foreign policy.

Tito, the Church, and the West

THE bridge between the Communists and the West that Tito once wanted to supply, has now become a bridge that Tito has burnt behind him. He is now bound to the West. He has accepted Western aid in the food crisis. The United States will, in fact, feed the Yugoslav army this winter. This aid was furnished without conditions, other than that Yugoslavia remain "free and independent." And the Yugoslavian leaders are reported to have been convinced by this that complete alignment with the West is now the only practical course. Milovan Djilas, of that country's politburo, said on November 20: "It is clear today that the gulf between [Russia] and us has become unbridgeable."

Edmund Stevens of *The Christian Science Monitor* reports that two Yugoslavian emissaries, Croatian priests, have been at the Vatican since November 1 trying to arrange a settlement with the Church. These are the terms: Tito will release all imprisoned Catholic clergy, including Archbishop Stepinatz (but the Archbishop must leave Yugoslavia). Free religious instruction will be reinstituted in the schools. The Catholic press will be freed. There will be state funds for Catholic schools. Direct contact between the Vatican and the Yugoslav hierarchy will be resumed. In return for these concessions Tito is said to ask that the Vatican discontinue its propaganda attack, that the Yugoslavian clergy be permitted to join a single national union, and that the clergy cooperate in the social and economic programs of the government.

These terms seem a basis for serious discussion. It is conceivable that they will lead to a settlement, for the Church traditionally has negotiated agreements with any government that would permit her freedom to teach and minister.

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So the Catholics and the Titoists might yet come to a cold truce. If Yugoslavia should maintain its part of the agreement, then Yugoslavian Catholics would again be free to worship. Expediency would have loosened Tito's grip on human liberties.

Liberties were talked about inside Yugoslavia last week. Adding to his attack on Russia, propaganda chief Djilas accused the Soviets of "violent and total pressure on the iron heel; espionage that has infiltrated into the tiniest cells of society —into the relations between husband and wife, parents and children, artists and their inspiration. . . . Shallow and trivial lies and demagogy and staged trials . . . lies and slander . . . in everything."

Whether Djilas' righteousness is equally hypocritical is the crucial question. So far the State Department has played this calculated game with Tito successfully by asking nothing of him but nationalism. We cannot afford to lose him now; but with that chasm behind him, he can afford even less to have us lose him. Internal pressure from Yugoslavian Catholics plus the exigencies of the international situation have forced him to make the trip to Rome. But there are others in Yugoslavia who are persecuted, others who are imprisoned; there are other freedoms that are denied. The West can now begin to turn the screw.

Tearing a Passion to Tatters

IF YOU will recall how things were before the night of November 7th last, you will remember, for one thing, that there was quite a bit of talk among the progressive, we-like-Ike Republicans about the possibility of throwing open the windows of the Republican clubrooms around the country and airing out some of the more stale, Old Guard ideas hanging in the gloom there.

But alas, what a morning-after was November 8th for the young Republicans. There, grinning at them from the front pages of their morning papers, was the ear-to-ear joy of Robert A. Taft, triumphant, and even on the inside pages it was more Taft, because there the news was of the victory of a tight little cluster of Taft's Old Guard fellow travelers: Dirksen, Millikin, Hickenlooper, Capehart and Wiley.

How did Mr. Taft do it? Well, he explained, the people were sick and tired of loose spending and a bungling Far Eastern foreign policy, so he promised to cut Federal spending and to get tougher with the Communists, and he won.

Now there does appear to be, of course, quite an inconsistency in the Senator's promises. Since it is going to cost more, not less, money to get tougher with the Communists—to talk big to China about Formosa, let's say, as Mr. Taft recommends—it would seem to be quite a trick to get tougher and to economize at the same time. But Mr. Taft intends to turn the trick according to what might be called the rules of inter-continental sleight of hand. He proposes to cut the Administration's military aid to Europe (he scorns the Atlantic Treaty) and its economic aid to underdeveloped areas, and he hopes instead to apply our men and money to the defense of Formosa and the Far East. In other words, we are advised to turn soft in the Atlantic and to get tough in the Pacific.

Luckily, most of us have learned long ago to take inconsistencies of this sort without batting an eye, since it is well-known by now that practical politics is, among other things, a snarl of inconsistencies. And Mr. Taft, too, is well-known by this time as a very puzzling fellow, to whom it is scarcely an embarrassment to have cold feet in Europe and his fists cocked in Asia.

But lest inconsistency at any time become too embarrassing, it needs, for proper disguise, an atmosphere in which the emotions can run roughshod over reason. So in the months just passed, Senator McCarthy has been the man in charge of atmosphere. His wild emotionalism has provided the bluster so necessary to the inconsistent mind, so necessary to the Taft Republicans in hiding the negativism of their attacks on our foreign policy.

The currents of unreason, like subterranean streams, seem to meet eventually somehow or other, and so it is that emotionalism in American politics finds itself flowing into the river of Soviet irrationalism. Perhaps the waters are separated at their source, but like the sea, unreason draws its unity from far and wide.

A better mixture is a meeting of minds and at another and wiser time in our history, that is what produced bi-partisanship in our foreign policy. Reason had to prevail then, as it must now, because, as the State Department puts it, "there is no longer any real distinction between 'domestic' and 'foreign' affairs." At home and abroad, we are what we are, rational or irrational. And if we think of ourselves as representing the cause of freedom at home and at large in the world, then there is a point beyond which we cannot afford to practice irrationalism, because such is the nature of things that only the truth can make us free.

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Paradise Enslaved

The savage atmosphere of motion picture - making.

By JAMES RORTY

SOONER or later Hollywood was bound to attract the cold eye of some wandering anthropologist for whom grub-eaters, head-hunters, rain-makers, snugglepups, and gigolos of the Bitch Goddess are fair game, no matter where they are encountered.

One can only be grateful that Hortense Powdermaker, author of *Hollywood, The Dream Factory* [*Little, Brown.* $3.50] got there first, since to her professional competence as an anthropologist she adds a good deal of artistic sensitiveness and insight. Indeed, without these supplementary gifts it would not have been possible for her to see Hollywood whole, as she has done rather remarkably: its variegated whoredoms and frustrations, its waste of money and talent, its moral and spiritual opacity and fraudulence, its enthroned oafs, clowns and sadists and its enslaved and embittered craftsmen; all this rubble of cultural anarchy and technological happenstance, and underneath it, a glowing and expanding core of genuine creativeness.

That core was there fifteen years ago when this writer, touring the country during the depression, dangled his feet in one of those famous swimming pools and sampled the private cellar of a friend who was temporarily in the money. Obviously, from Miss Powdermaker's account and from the evidence of recent films, the core is bigger now. Otherwise, how explain a phenomenon like "All the King's Men," which on the printed page seemed merely good, with reservations, but on the screen was convincingly first-rate?

Such triumphs are still rare enough to be considered flukes on the whole. The people responsible for them are still members of the "out-group," to adopt Miss Powdermaker's anthropological category. But there are more of them, and by this time they are fighting the in-group more or less openly for control—with some chance of winning, since not all the original prospectors and their cousins can live forever, nor can all the new crop of banker-bosses be artistic morons.

Broadly, what is the matter with Hollywood, as Miss Powdermaker was quick to discover, is that for the most part the executives who determine the choice of material and the making of pictures literally don't know what the shooting is about. Art has no more meaning to them than Beethoven to a deaf man, or Van Gogh to a blind man. That writers, directors, and actors are morally obligated to respect and express their talents is incomprehensible to them.

"Give me no more of these $150-a-week geniuses!" yelled a movie tycoon when told that a recalcitrant writer had resigned rather than foul up his script. "I want a $2,000-a-week writer who has an estate and is paying alimony to his wife."

That every man has his price is the ruling assumption and it is rarely challenged. That one writer could possibly be better than the customary five writers is flying in the face of arithmetic. That movies can't be standardized and rolled out on a conveyor belt like Coca-Cola bottles is a source of continuing exasperation; baffled, Mr. Big resorts to incantations, like any frustrated Melanesian chieftain. Or he calls in a pollster to find out what the customers liked the last time—the idea that they might like something new doesn't occur to him.

★

THE trouble, of course, is that Mr. Big doesn't know his customers, or, more importantly, care for them. He just wants their money at the box office. To get it, he is quite prepared to play the pimp, knowing that there is a permanent market for pornography among adolescents and among unpleasant and lascivious adults like himself. He expects the aspiring starlet to sleep with him in exchange for professional advancement, but he also expects her to blackmail him with a paternity suit if she can; hence he finds it safer on the whole to patronize a high-class call-house.

He takes a similarly practical view of the Code and Legion of Decency censorships. He doesn't fight them; he has nothing to fight *for* since he feels no artistic compulsion to communicate anything true, or beautiful or tragic about love, or lust, or life in general. Like the starlet, he'd hop into bed with the Legion of Decency in a minute if he thought it would pay. Instead, he has worked out a standard routine by which the studio hacks observe the absurd letter of the codes, and astutely and pruriently violate their spirit.

JAMES RORTY *is a poet and journalist whose work on the subjects of mass communication includes the book:* Advertising, His Master's Voice.

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Melanesian fishermen avoid sexual intercourse before setting forth to the fishing banks; it might interfere with the catch. Similarly, movie lovers, with an eye on the Code office, kiss with closed mouths.

★

RECENTLY the pix business has been poor. Hollywood is sick. Big budgets and big-name stars can no longer be counted on to ensure big box office receipts. So in desperation the front office Mr. Bigs have been yielding a little freedom and power to the small out-group of able and serious writers and directors whom they hate, and would like to despise, and who hate and despise them with full hearts, as any visitor to Hollywood soon learns. Thus we get "The Snake Pit," "All the King's Men" and other Oscar-winning box office successes which prove with impressive regularity that the customers like art when they get it, and that the intangibles of talent and artistic integrity are exploitable assets —if only the Mr. Bigs cared—or more accurately, dared—to exploit them.

They neither care nor dare. What they are concerned with is the maintenance of the system of power relationships of which they are the beneficiaries. The system is essentially totalitarian, and like all such systems is imperiled by the admission of other than material values. Always, and indomitably, the artist strives to free both himself and his world. But would such a freed, adult, and austere Hollywood pay Mr. Big a half million dollars a year? Why, and for what? Would any civilized community tolerate the performance of the Mr. Mighty who bullied his mistress sadistically on the set until in tears she pleaded with him: "But please, John!" At which the director bellowed: "'John' in bed, you bitch —Mr. Mighty on the set!"

The point is that Hollywood, Mecca of the world's literary, musical and dramatic talent, is probably the least civilized community in America. Its public and private morals are those of a mining camp, or of some of the uglier cultural configurations of the South Pacific. Its phoniness is not just artistic and intellecual, but profoundly moral and spiritual.

To the question: How can honest and civilized artists and craftsmen live and breathe in such an atmosphere?, the answer is that they can't and don't. They isolate themselves in beach cabins and on desert ranches. They commute by plane from New York. They enter the studios wearing psychological gas masks, collect $3,000 a week for a few weeks, and duck out again to resume work on their novels.

The miracle is that any good work can be produced in such a setting, but the miracle is there, and the leaner the Hollywood budgets, the more the miracle manifests itself. Any consideration of Hollywood makes one keenly aware of these economic determinants: the padded overheads, the preposterous salaries, the racketeering accountancy according to which a picture that runs three years is expected to pay off a hundred per cent in six months. If the effect of television is to sweat some of this fat off Hollywood's middle, and with it to eliminate a few of the arrogant and talentless leeches who make life hell for decent literary and theatrical craftsmen, then Hollywood may yet bring to magnificent maturity an art form whose potentialities we have seen as yet only in occasional glimpses.

It won't happen soon or easily. Here are a few of the facts with which Miss Powdermaker, for instance, tempers her own and her readers' optimism:

By the judgment of their peers, only 25 or perhaps as many as 50 of the 1,000 members of the Screen Writer's Guild are genuinely talented. Of 213 in the $500 to $1,250 a week salary bracket, less than 15 per cent were considered talented.

Of the 280-odd Hollywood directors, not more than 5 or 6 per cent were rated by the directors themselves as being gifted. Actors, the group who work closest with them, give them the same or a slightly lower rating.

The industry, now a half century old, still hasn't the slightest idea why people go to the movies or why they stay away. Nor has it determined the relationship between the cost of a movie and its profits. Competent social scientists could rather easily formulate and conduct studies that would give illuminating answers to both questions. The industry doesn't ask—perhaps Mr. Big doesn't want to know.

Hollywood exhibits the spectacle of a completely unionized industry, self-enslaved by a firmly etablished contract system, with a six-month option clause that makes insecurity, anxiety, sycophancy, dishonesty and stomach ulcers endemic in the area.

★

"HOLLYWOOD," summarizes Miss Powdermaker, "has elaborated totalitarian elements . . . the concept of people as property and as objects to be manipulated, highly concentrated and personalized power for power's sake, an amorality, and an atmosphere of breaks, continuous anxiety and crises. The result of this over-elaboration is business inefficiency, deep frustration in human relations, and a high number of unentertaining second and third-rate movies."

Either because of being or in spite of being an anthropologist Miss Powdermaker is a good reporter. As that admirable trade paper *Variety* might headline it: *"Pix Biz Rocked by Anthropologist's Blitz."*

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The Lost Audience

The popular arts are reducing their public to the status of robots.

By EMMET LAVERY

CAN the free men of a free society remain free if they remain indifferent to mediocrity? Is there still time to escape the mass pattern for the mass man which is rapidly developing in the communication arts? Does television *have* to be the Pandora's box of our time?

These are only a few of the questions which Gilbert Seldes asks in *The Great Audience* [*Viking.* $3.75] and, while the final answers are on the side of hope, the evidence under consideration is more than a little terrifying.

To put it bluntly, Seldes' is one of the most disturbing books of the year. It is also, in a casual and disarming way, wise and witty.

Mr. Seldes is a critic who likes the arts which he criticizes. Many years ago he made literary history with a volume titled *The Seven Lively Arts,* a book which was actually more concerned with artists than with art. Today he levels off with a candid survey of motion pictures, radio and television and he speaks from experience. He worked in all of these fields, and his work has not soured him on these art forms.

Yes, in Mr. Seldes' book, these media of communication are a kind of art. A public art, to be sure, and a quickly vanishing one so far as each particular image is concerned. They are part of man's slant on life: mechanized, diffused, even distorted on many occasions, but with a more powerful, more immediate and more lasting effect upon our behavior patterns than many of the custodians of the older art forms are willing to admit.

The audience, to which Seldes refers, is in reality a three-part thing: part of it is the "captive" audience which television inherited from the radio, the people who find it easier to stay at home than to go anywhere else; part of it is the audience in motion, the thirty millions or so (most of them under the age of thirty) who still go to films with reasonable frequency, perhaps out of an unconscious desire to see once more the things that they saw in the neighborhood theatres as children; part of it is what might be called the "lost audience," the people who stopped going to the films when they felt that they had outgrown the myths of the silver screen.

Actually, it is the "lost audience" which is to blame for much of the banality in the communication arts. For this was the articulate, the responsive section of the big audience. These are the people who might have demanded and who might have made possible something better. These are the people who might still turn the tide but, as Mr. Seldes makes clear, you can not change things by merely refusing to look at them.

This was the mistake that so many writers made with respect to motion pictures, as well as radio, during the last twenty years. They sold their best literary properties outright to films with few if any qualifications. They surrendered control of their material and never asked who would adapt it nor how many times it might be re-adapted. If the price was big enough, they settled quickly for the cash and told themselves that no other good was going to come out of the enterprise. True, a few of the top names did venture out to Hollywood to work on their own material, but not more than once or twice. And when they did, some of them even refused to master the techniques of the screen play form. They considered it too mechanical.

★

THIS is literary snobbery almost any way you want to look at it. Mr. Edmund Wilson of *The New Yorker,* to be sure, does prefer to look at it another way and, in an otherwise favorable review, he chides Mr. Seldes for his strictures against the "intellectuals" who turned their backs on the popular arts. This is a theme on which Mr. Wilson chides with much persuasive irony but, when all the evidence is finally weighed, the scales will tip in favor of Mr. Seldes on this point and not in favor of Mr. Wilson.

Let us grant freely that the popular arts, for their part, have never been quick to understand the "intellectuals." They treated them as stereotypes in their stories (the absent-minded professors) and as wage slaves (golden though the fetters were) in their production set-ups. Yet the fact remains that, within their limitations, the popular arts were hospitable enough. They looked high and low for talent and in the end it was the "intellectuals" who made the detour, not the popular arts.

If the big names could have stood the heat of

EMMET LAVERY, *former president of the Screen Writers Guild, will be represented on the screen this winter by "The Magnificent Yankee," his own screen adaptation of his stage play.*

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the day, they might have made a dent in time on the armor of innumerable front offices. But it was too tough a fight. They left the field to their more militant brethren in the various guilds. Even today some of the big names still stand aloof from the fight for writers' rights which is gathering momentum in the Radio Writers Guild, the National Television Committee and the Screen Writers Guild.

True, there are first-rate dramatists and novelists who stand shoulder to shoulder with their brother craftsmen in the younger arts. In the Screen Writers Guild there are some 200 members who also hold membership in either the Authors Guild or the Dramatists Guild. But the giants of the writing crafts are not any more excited by television than they were about films.

But you can't look the other way. Not any more. The challenge in the popular arts, as in life itself, is the challenge between meaning and no meaning. All the books and all the poems, all the essays and all the quarterlies will be of no avail, if the great audiences of the world become less and less responsive, more and more content with anything that is available.

★

GILBERT SELDES, in writing *The Great Audience,* has done a great service to all of the popular arts, to the people who work in them, to the audiences who depend on them. He is strict but he is fair. He does not go quite so far as Dr. Hortense Powdermaker does in *Hollywood, the Dream Factory*. Dr. Powdermaker's judgment on films is that the present set-up exalts property over people and the resulting mood is definitely on the totalitarian side. Mr. Seldes merely says that the popular arts are raising up a nation of robots. And yet, Mr. Seldes is a man of hope. So is Dore Schary, vice-president of M-G-M. He says in *Case History of a Movie* [*Random House*] that there is a place for ideals in the popular arts and there is a place for men with ideals in these fields.

> The most hopeful thing is that motion pictures themselves, are improving. They are, I think, to a great extent, a reflection of American education and culture. We know, for instance, that twenty years ago the average education of our audience was a trifle below that of a grammar school graduate. Now it has reached the second year of high school. It is reasonable to suppose that, in another twenty years, it will have reached the high-school graduation level. Man's life and leisure are expanding, so he has more time for education.

Yes, more time for education and more time for the arts too.

Is this too hopeful in this unpredictable year of 1950? There was hope too in Pandora's box. Even if it was at the bottom.

FROM ITALY

Misery That Pays

NAPLES

NAPLES means much more than the beauty of the Vesuvius, more than the Bay with its refined luxury and its romantic love songs. It means more than the slums and the corruption, which is so clever that it sometimes comes near to genius. It is all that, of course, but it is still something else behind these somewhat deceiving appearances, and it is extremely difficult for the foreigner to approach it and above all to understand it. For instance there is the fantastic world living around the highly respectable and official pawnbrokery, run by the well-known Banco di Napoli, with traditions going back to the time when the Italians taught the world the art of banking. It is the last offspring of the originally religious banking institutions, called Monti di Pieta, founded in the fifteenth century by the Franciscans who wanted to break the Jewish banking monopoly by charging low interest rates or no rates at all. It has nothing religious about it any more, but its purpose is not profit, despite the fact that one has to pay 20% for every loan. Its budget regularly shows a loss. Its staff is too numerous and allegedly costs too much.

I decided to see for myself and one morning I joined the endless queue which wound down the stairs of the pompous and dirty building, where the central pawnbrokery has had its headquarters for centuries. It is in the very heart of the old Naples in a quarter where pawnbrokers are to be found, as in another quarter prostitutes can be found. There is also a section for fortune tellers and one for the smugglers of American cigarettes. But I was struck by the fact that the people in the queues did not look particularly depressed or ashamed.

It was so interesting just to stay there and watch them, that I found myself in no time in front of the employee in the window. I handed him a gold ring, he inspected it carefully and told me what he was authorized to pay without looking up at me: five dollars. I asked him the value of the ring and his reply was as disinterested and as matter of fact as before: thirteen dollars. As I hesitated he looked up at me for the first time with a puzzled and impatient look, which said as clearly as words: if you are not interested, clear off and let the next one come to the window. He was as neutral and bureaucratic as an employee in a post office.

A few minutes later I had cashed the four dollars and eighty-five cents, getting a receipt for five dollars. My ring disappeared into a small rusty box and was taken away to the pawnbrokery's deep iron-plated vaults.

As I walked out of the building, a young man, who

Gunnar D. Kumlien, who is a foreign correspondent for the newspaper Stockholms-Tidningen, will report regularly to THE COMMONWEAL *from Italy.*

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seemed to have been waiting for me and was sitting on a small chair at the entrance, rose, apologized for addressing me without knowing me, and offered me more than what I had actually got for the ring. Without even looking at my pawn-ticket, which apparently was intended to be the security, he proposed straightaway eight dollars, which he increased to eight-fifty, when I left him. Then a second man whispered eight-seventy-five in my ear and a third went as far as nine. A fourth offered me nine, too. This seemed to be the maximum.

★

THIS was my first contact with the mighty and well-organized pawnbrokers gang of Naples, whose economic interests are so big that nobody dares to attack it.

Next morning I redeemed my ring for five dollars—the loan had cost me fifteen cents and could have lasted three months—and went with a ragged guide to explore this strange world and get closer to its mighty rulers. We had to proceed very carefully in order to avoid arousing the suspicion of its extremely sensitive and efficient intelligence organization. It was like penetrating into a jungle with only a native guide, knowing that innumerable unseen eyes were watching us and that our every step was watched and that appropriate warnings were issued.

There are hundreds of "private agencies" in the quarter round the big central pawnbrokery. The oldest and richest—some of them belong to real dynasties—can afford to do without publicity and remain in the same old dusty shops where they have been for ages, like the best-known British insurance companies in London. They have the pride of their trade. Others follow a line more up-to-date and have nice, clean shops all covered with different sorts of polished marble, and after nightfall, they have blinking neon lights, suggestive in their way, of that vague and alluring world of anticipation. Others have sordid places on some third or fourth floor; usually the brokers here sit between a desk and an old-fashioned safe like huge spiders, practicing "home service," as it is called. This means that they visit their customers' homes proposing new deals and, above all, collecting interest.

My ring went from hand to hand and the offers were different depending on whether they were made to me or to my ragged companion, but they were never lower than seven dollars and a half. These pawnbrokers, whose psychological *coup d'oeil* is sometimes amazing, usually take a higher interest from people belonging to the middle classes or from foreign refugees than from proletarians, who are apt to shout when they are desperate. Middle class people usually are ashamed of making a fuss, even if they have to pay up to 600%.

Finally my ring was pawned for nine dollars by a fascinating old spider, with a black greasy skull-cap on the top of his head. This place was in a dark hole on the fourth floor of a building still bomb-damaged. That is, I did not cash nine dollars, but only eight dollars and ten cents, and when I wanted to redeem the ring the day after, I was told to return next day. He had apparently pawned it at the official pawnbrokery with other things, no doubt in order to have more cash for further operations and more room in his own safes. When I finally got it back I had to pay nine dollars and ten cents, which means that the loan had cost me one dollar for three days. But according to the receipt the interest had only been three cents.

★

WHEN I watched the customers in all these "private agencies" I understood that the customers in the official pawnbrokery were supposed to be considered well-to-do people, in such a position that they could "afford" to receive only a small part of the real value of their pawns and, afterwards, they were supposed to enjoy the advantage of being able to pay "only" 20%. But here in the private agencies misery was brutally, shamelessly naked and was exploited ruthlessly to the very last consequence. There were poor women offering worn sheets and pillow cases, or blankets all patched up, in order to receive fifty cents or one dollar. It is possible to sleep on a bed without sheets or blankets, but it is not possible to live without food. There were women with whole bundles of pawn-tickets desperately trying to pay the exorbitant interest, hoping against hope not to lose the pawns. There were so-called "porters," that is poor devils from the suburbs carrying huge bags containing all sorts of odd human belongings which were entrusted to them by other poor devils, who asked them to bring all this to the pawnbroker for a compensation of ten per cent. There were old people with complete cheap kitchen outfits of aluminum. There were pale youngsters with worn clothes wrapped up in newspapers. And then, of course, people brought the usual cheap jewels. The rates ranged from 300 to 650%.

Does any human trade or investment exist that yields higher profits than that? The worst brand of misery can yield a higher dividend than prosperity, particularly if this misery is made incurable through unemployment. In Naples every third inhabitant is directly or indirectly a victim of unemployment, so the pawnbrokers can be confident. Their boom is a safe one, all the more so since interest is not the gang's only source of profit. It controls the auctions, too, where the pawns from the official pawnbrokery are sold, so that the prices are kept down below a certain level. No outsiders are tolerated, or if they try to bid, they are outmaneuvered. And last but not least, many of the small jewelry shops in the pawnbroker's quarter belong to them. Here the pawns bought cheaply are sold as new and then the cycle starts all over again.

The police know what is going on, but they seem to be willing to intervene only very rarely. There is no written evidence of the gang's activity and it pays its taxes regularly and without delay, more regularly than anybody else in Naples.

But do not the victims react? Well no, because they are afraid of the mighty gang and they live in such economic circumstances that they fear above all to be put on its black list, since that means that they will never get another loan on a pawn.

GUNNAR D. KUMLIEN.

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The Stage

THE LADY'S NOT FOR BURNING

CHRISTOPHER FRY has done one extremely important thing: he has discovered a twentieth-century verse form for comedy. Matters had got to the point where it was almost impossible to convince anyone that comedy *could* be written in verse, so strong is the stranglehold of prose upon our age. Lip service was still paid to the notion of verse tragedy, because both verse *and* tragedy seemed equally remote from our time; but prose comedy had been galloping along at a successful rate and there seemed no reason to wish for anything better. Mr. Fry has given us something better—has found an imagery and a rhythm for comedy which increases the intellectual and emotional range of things to be laughed at—and his work comes as a stunning surprise.

Broadway has had to wait for Mr. Fry's second American production to take his work to heart. Last season's "A Phoenix Too Frequent" was apparently so ruinously directed and acted as to conceal completely the quality of the play. On the printed page "Phoenix" seems to me the most perfect thing of its kind since "The Importance of Being Earnest" and, within its limited intention and shorter length, superior to "The Lady's Not for Burning." It has a sharply defined narrative that is developed with alacrity and precision. By comparison, "The Lady" seems talky and meandering. But "The Lady" has its own virtues and they represent an experimental advance for Fry. He has tried for more complexity and got a richer texture out of it. He has tried for more rounded characterization and picked up a little human warmth. Where the earlier play was a perfect joke, intellectual to the core, the new one is an imperfect but possibly more appealing attempt to capture nature on its own vexing, complicated, and fulsome terms. It keeps shifting gears, and pulling back into first rather too often, but when it gets where it is going you feel you have been with the people all the way. "Phoenix" is an exercise in detachment, "The Lady" an experiment in participation. Fry asks you to accompany the characters rather than observe them.

There is a danger here of becoming too fulsome. In one of his plays Mr. Fry has a character settle back and sigh happily: *It's nice that anyone can say anything at all.*

And it is nice, now that verse has made it possible. But drama is still limited by the singleness of its action and the things said must have some relation to this singleness. Occasionally Mr. Fry forgets this and indulges himself in the pure delight of all that can be said. I am so grateful for the method of saying it that I am willing to indulge him his indulgence, but the audience isn't likely to, and he will do well to brake his verbal exuberance every now and then.

The effect of talkiness is accented by John Gielgud's performance in the present production. Where the rest of the company, under Mr. Gielgud's own direction, is reading contemporary verse as though it *were* contemporary, Gielgud himself is frequently guilty of chanting. The result is that Fry's verse has been compared to Shakespeare's in some quarters, whereas the author's chief distinction is that he has found a new form instead of echoing an old one. If Fry is like anything, he is like Shaw in verse.

In a still later play, "Venus Observed," the stuffy Dominic is informing his sister Perpetua that their charming father is a crook and likely to go to jail. Dominic expects his sister to be shocked, but she is a pleasant realist:

> Perpetua: . . . *I was able to believe you at once.*
> *Poppadillo has the most beguiling*
> *Jackdaw look about him. But you think*
> *He wouldn't be happy in prison?*
>
> Dominic: *He wouldn't, but what*
> *Difference does that make? Would you be able*
> *To look anyone in the face, with a father jailed?*
>
> Perpetua: *Oh, yes, if he were comfortable.*

That is like a dozen passages in Shaw, and Fry has much of the impudent love of paradox, the passion for plain sense, and the hopeful cynicism of his prose forebear. He has neither the romanticism of Shakespearian high comedy nor the lowness of Shakespearian bumpkin comedy. Even when, in "The Lady's Not for Burning," he introduces two brothers who seem on the bumpkin side, they turn out to have the intellectual facility and emotional disillusionment of a couple of Shavian Caesars. Mr. Gielgud is unwittingly doing the playwright a disservice by letting himself lapse into recitation.

Mr. Fry is something very fresh and exciting in the contemporary theatre, and when he finally masters his plotting and brings himself to reject a few of the bright sayings which come into his head, he may well turn out to be of the first rank. (*At the Royale.*)

THE COUNTRY GIRL

CLIFFORD ODETS has taken a very small and very familiar situation and, by the simple process of being patient with it, found it to contain more dramatic interest than anyone could have supposed. His story is that of the actor who has drunk himself downhill and of the wife of the director who pulls him back into shape for a performance. The trouble with clichés is that people treat them as clichés; they slap them onto a stage in their baldest outlines, without taking the trouble to think them through again. Odets has thought this one through, down to the last detail, and it comes out with the reality it must have had the first time some-

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one used it. He has been particularly successful with his actor: the man's moral weakness, superimposed aggressiveness, and natural talent are blended in a dimensional character which is not at all attractive, but is commanding because it is true. Paul Kelly plays it brilliantly. Mr. Odets has been less successful, I think, with the wife, the "country girl" of the title, but Uta Hagen plays her with such skill and force that it isn't until you leave the theatre that you realize the character has never been adequately explained. The role of the director is an old Odets standby: the biting, restless egocentric, and Steven Hill makes him as effective as ever.

The play is well balanced: passages of quiet, careful motivation are followed by inevitable and satisfying flare-ups; nothing is tacked on; everything moves with easy confidence. If it is all a little clinical, if you do not become much attached to any of the figures, and if the author's passion for the theatre sometimes approaches naiveté, it is nevertheless an impressive evening in the theatre, both as a play and as a production. (*At the Lyceum.*)

BELL, BOOK, AND CANDLE

JOHN VAN DRUTEN habitually works a very shallow vein, but he refines it carefully and sometimes makes it glitter. His newest play, however, seemed to me to run dry too quickly, and while I admired the polish which the author and actors have given it, I didn't really get an awful lot of fun out of it. There were only three or four emphatic laughs over the evening, and a fair amount of pretty obvious punning. The piece is about a modern-dress witch who gets her man by casting a spell over him, and the actors made a number of remarks, sometimes making the same one twice, about being "spellbound" or finding the situation "enchanting." Lilli Palmer is a devastating witch, and Rex Harrison is adroit as her victim, and you may find the evening rewarding enough just watching them work. They skim the surface of an amusing idea very neatly, but after awhile you become aware that there isn't much under them and start yearning for a headier brew. (*At the Barrymore.*)

WALTER KERR.

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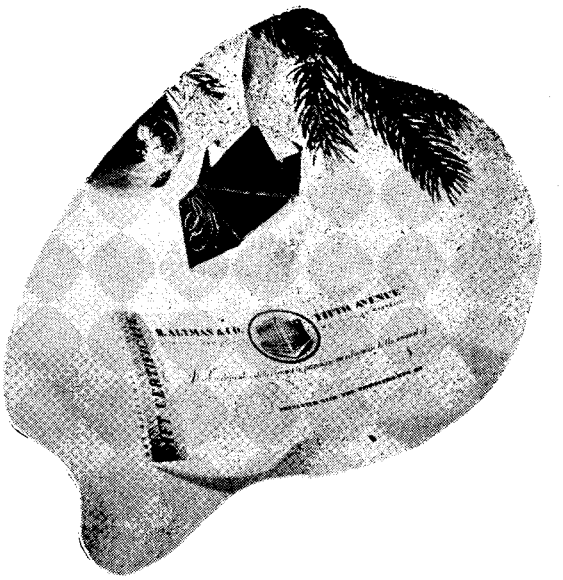

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The Screen

Les affaires sont les affaires

ADMIRERS of "Brief Encounter," that fine Noel Coward film that won huzzahs some four years ago, will probably like *"L'Affaire,"* a French import with a similar theme. Actually the English movie used the camera very well and worked out much better cinematically, whereas the French film is inclined to be talky; and while Herman Weinberg's English subtitles that accompany "L'Affaire" are good, their frequency slows up the action. The French movie deserves your attention, however, for its good acting and for its adult handling of an old plot: the pick-up that develops into an affair.

This story is extremely simple: on the train a famous pianist meets the young, naive wife of an old schoolmate; they become friendly and in Paris he persuades her to come to his rehearsal hall instead of going home. Later they have dinner at a night-club and spend the night at his apartment. The next day, while at the railroad station to pick up some packages which his wife said she lost on the train, the husband runs into the pianist who is taking the packages to the lost-and-found department; and he invites the other man to come to his home and meet his wife. The resulting triangle is portrayed with mounting tension and poignancy. In spite of the verbose script, Director E. E. Reinert succeeds in making the story quite moving; although the solution employs a rather melodramatic device, it works out well.

The musical score, part of which is supposedly played by the pianist, is used skilfully in "L'Affaire," and the recording by the Paris Conservatory Symphony Orchestra is excellent. So are the characterizations: Claude Dauphin as the smooth, debonair man-about-town who is enchanted by the unsophisticated young woman he meets on the train; Anne Vernon as the sheltered wife who is swept off her feet by the attentions of such a famous pianist; Henri Guisol as the husband—suspicious, jealous and wanting above all to keep his wife. Hollywood could well take a lesson from this French film that handles marital infidelity with subtlety and realism. "L'Affaire" is particularly successful in portraying the emotions of the wife and her growth from an immature girl into a responsible woman.

★

MOVIEGOERS who may wonder why we haven't seen more of such a polished actor as Claude Dauphin can see him again in *"Deported,"* an American film made in Italy. But they should be warned at once that this is a rather shoddy thriller about a gangster (Jeff Chandler) who is deported to his native Italy where he immediately gets into a black market deal. For various not too clear reasons a lovely countess (Marta Toren) falls in love with him; and she and Claude Dauphin, as an Italian dick, manage to keep the gangster from pulling off a big theft of food and drugs. The attractive Italian backgrounds in this movie and the good cast are thoughtlessly wasted on the cheap story.

★

WHEN the famous German film, *"The Blue Angel"* was shown in this country about twenty years ago, it had an English-dialogue sound-track dubbed in. I didn't see this version, but I'm told that the device was not too successful. Now "The Blue Angel" is being released again, this time with the German sound track plus English subtitles. Many moviegoers, like myself, seeing this film for the first time, will be surprised at its stridently raw sexy atmosphere. Actually the story, stemming from a novel by Heinrich Mann, is quite moralistic: a rather sweet and stuffy professor (expertly played by Emil Jannings) is so indignant that his students are frequenting a low beer-hall that he goes to the place to protest; although shocked at the fleshy display of dames on the stage, he is fascinated by one Lola Lola (Marlene Dietrich in an obviously calculated performance) and he falls for this singer, marries her and sinks to her level. Seldom have the movies shown such a complete picture of a man's degeneration, and seldom have they been so realistic in visualizing the tawdry and sensual atmosphere surrounding a man's fall. At times Josef von Sternberg's direction fits the mood of the piece perfectly; at times it goes in for melodramatic hokum. As a period piece, "The Blue Angel" with its bad taste and unglamorous glamor still holds a place of distinction in the history of motion pictures.

★

IF YOU'D like some Americana to wash away this German decadence, you'll find *"The Jackpot"* right up your alley. It shows what happens to a nice, middle-class, Indiana family when they win one of those big, ridiculous radio-quiz programs. James Stewart and his wife, Barbara Hale, and two kids and neighbors and friends are astonished when Jimmy gives the right answer and is to get the $24,000 jackpot. But they're really swept off their feet when the stuff arrives and clutters up the house, garage, yard and street: a refrigerator, electric range, home freezer with a three-year supply of frozen food, a piano, hats, trees, a pony, 7,500 cans of soup, etc., etc. Now really! And then there's the little problem of income tax.

Well, Director Walter Lang stretches this comedy on and on. Most of it is quite funny; but it gets a touch tiresome as poor Jimmy's life gets more and more complicated. Not the least of his problems is the Greenwich Village artist (Patricia Medina) who comes to paint his portrait as part of the deal. Phoebe and Henry Ephron wrote their script from an article by John McNulty and while the jokes and slapstick keep you laughing, you begin to wish after a while that the pattern could be enlarged a little. The situation is tenuous; we've seen Jimmy as the great American boy before, and we begin to wonder when he's going to grow up and really be the father he portrays.

PHILIP T. HARTUNG.

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Books

The Wisdom of the Sands. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. Translated by Stuart Gilbert. Harcourt. $4.

HAILED as one of the most important French books published in the last decade, Saint-Exupéry's posthumous work is indeed written in the noblest tradition of that country. The author's own high ethical and literary standards are reflected in every page, as is the finest French military tradition of devotion to duty, discipline and sacrifice. "Saint-Ex.," as people affectionately called him, was as much a soldier as he was a writer, and as much an airman as he was a poet. His two famous "flights" (*Night-Flight* and *Flight to Arras*) are modern versions of Alfred de Vigny's *Grandeur et Servitude Militaire*. And we may also say that the desert-conqueror who is the main character in *Wisdom of the Sands* is not too distant a relative of Psichari's *Centurion*. The mysticism and asceticism of the African desert are things the French soul has vividly and deeply realized. Though he does not speak a strictly Christian, but rather a pre-Christian or extra-Christian, ethical language, the desert-teacher of Wisdom, portrayed by Saint-Exupéry, is far more in the line of Charles de Foucauld than of Zarathustra; true, he has been compared to the latter, but that is only because of the form of speech the author has chosen, in order to express his own ethical, social and religious precepts.

The Wisdom of the Sands is a condensed version (the condensation is, however, very slight) of the French text, published under the title *Citadelle*.

SAINT-EXUPÉRY worked on this manuscript for a long time, and with great thoughtfulness: first in New York during the war while he waited to return to active service; then in North Africa, where at last he joined the Free French Forces. As the translator, Stuart Gilbert, tells us in his excellent preface, Saint-Exupéry himself referred to *Citadelle* as to his "posthumous work," because he did not want to bring it out in a hurry, and sought the greatest possible perfection in form and in content. But also, no doubt, because he was in a way already aware of the short span of life accorded him.

His ultimate dedication was that of the soldier, of the airman. Stuart Gilbert tells us how, on July 31st, 1944, Saint-Exupéry accomplished his last mission and never returned; a German pilot-observer simply noting that a French reconnaissance plane was "brought down in flames over the sea."

It is this death of a soldier that lends the writer's and poet's voice in *Wisdom of the Sands* such grave and quiet authority. The desert-king pictured by Saint-Exupéry in his last book conveys to us an ultimate message: a message of moral fortitude, and at the same time of compassion. A message of unity, since God is "the knot that holds things together." A message of creative energy and joy, since man is only happy in the values he produces; not for their own sake, but for the sake of the loving work he puts into them. The wisdom of the desert is then to reinstate essential moral values and principles, to discover beyond the chaos of our times a perennial philosophy, founded on a few simple truths: the fellowship of men, the primacy of duty over pleasure, of spirit over flesh, and above all, the presence of God, on which note Saint-Exupéry's last book triumphantly ends.

HELENE ISWOLSKY.

Boswell's London Journal, 1762-1763. Edited by Frederick A. Pottle. McGraw-Hill. $5.

THE most romantic literary find ever made now makes its first public appearance with all the fanfare of a million dollar film. Owned by Yale, sponsored by an editorial committee of four scholars, backed by an advisory committee of twenty-four illustrious and erudite persons, prefaced by Christopher Morley, edited by Frederick A. Pottle, written by James Boswell—*Boswell's London Journal, 1762-1763.*

James Boswell lodged in London from November 19, 1762, to August 4, 1763. During that period he wrote a journal which covers 219 pages of print, and dispatched it by instalments to his Scots friend John Johnston. The *Journal* was thus conscious art—the history of James Boswell, his opinions, reflections, contacts and adventures—and as such presents a picture some little way from actual fact. As the editor candidly admits, "When he surveyed himself each morning, he knew that most of the time instead of being what he wished himself to be—a brilliant, high-bred man of pleasure, poised, courtly, imperturbable, holding scoffers in awe by the rapier of his wit—he was really a raw, loud, romping, over-eager boy: greedy, stingy, and with brutal tastes."

BOSWELL'S object in visiting London was to obtain a commission in the Guards through the influence of the Duke of Queensberry or the Countess of Northumberland. Boswell had, however, no desire for active service, for which he was hardly fitted; he hoped that, as an officer in the Guards, he would have a secure position in the best London society. He was not successful; and, when his hopes finally faded, he set off for Utrecht to continue his education. He was then aged 22.

Boswell's activities in London were circumscribed. His father allowed him £200 a year, a meager sum for a gentleman of leisure, and Boswell was, perforce, economical, not to say mean. If he could persuade a whore to take him for nothing he was delighted; if not, sixpence was his usual limit. But he met some interesting characters and recorded their opinions fully; among his acquantances were Garrick, Wilkes, Macpherson (author of *Ossian*) and Goldsmith; and, on May 16th, 1763, he encountered Samuel Johnson. The change thereafter was remarkable.

The two men—Johnson was now 54—were immediately attracted, each

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flattered by the attention of the other. The popular impression that Boswell was Johnson's doormat is flatly contradicted in the *Journal*. After the first meeting, they met again on May 24th, and on June 13th Johnson asked Boswell why he did not call more often. The decisive meeting was on June 25th when Boswell told Johnson of his history, his troubles with his father, and his lapse from faith. Johnson was touched. "Give me your hand," he said, "I have taken a liking to you," and thereupon proceeded to argue in defense of Christianity. Johnson in the *Journal* is even more impressive than Johnson in the *Life*. Thereafter, the relationship became almost that of father and son. Boswell left London on August 4th; in the interval he had spent a considerable part of thirteen days in Johnson's company. It says much for Johnson's influence that Boswell only lapsed twice in these last weeks, and each time with at least a twinge of remorse.

THE volume is sumptuously produced, and edited with charm, modesty and imagination: Professor Pottle's introduction is a model for editors, though his estimate of Boswell's literary greatness may not be fully shared by every reader. The *Journal* lacks the fascinating and minute detail of Pepys' *Diary*, and Boswell has little sense of humor—but young men of 22 take themselves very seriously. As a psychological document the *Journal* is of first-rate importance; self-portraits so full, skillful and frank are rare; but it does not necessarily follow that the artist was a great man. Indeed, some readers may from time to time be heard to mutter: "Repulsive ass!"

G. B. HARRISON.

The Mill on the Po. Riccardo Bacchelli. Pantheon. $4.

THE MILL ON THE PO is the finest historical novel we have had of twentieth-century Italy. In structure and content obviously modeled on the artistic taste of an older generation (Bacchelli must be in his sixties), it manifests a cohesion and an organic unity reminiscent of some of the great historical novels of the nineteenth century. It is this very quality of belonging to an older world, distant out of all just proportion, which makes an adequate appreciation of the novel rather difficult.

The story is that of three generations of millers along the banks of the Po in Emilia, in the Papal States, from the end of the Napoleonic regime to the unification of Italy. The hero, Lazzaro Scacerni, returning from the Napoleonic campaign in Russia with some stolen ecclesiastical goods bequeathed to him by a French officer whom he had helped, a former priest, invests his money in a mill, marries, has a child who turns out to be a coward and a knave, and dies. The valor which was lost in his own child reappears in his grandchild who is killed, still a youngster, fighting with Garibaldian troops.

The mother of this grandchild continues after his death the struggle against storms and famine and the novel ends with her eventual triumph. Woven into this plot are the questionings of the hero on his right to use the ill-gotten ecclesiastical treasures, the depiction of the recurrent batterings of the floods which afflicted the region, the growing hostility between Austrian and Papal governments, and the gradual infiltration of the idea of Italy among the common people. It is a rich tapestry which Bacchelli weaves.

The disconcerting element in this picture, that peculiar quality which is so difficult to appreciate today, is its sense of balance. To write of life in the Papal States before the unification of Italy without bitterness or polemics is already quite a feat. But to set off the blunders and excesses of the Italian nationalists, the Garibaldini, and the Austrians against those of the Papal administration, the Sanfedisti, is truly poise, if not the echoing of a great Catholic tradition which goes back to Manzoni. In addition to this moderation, the solemnity with which the life-death cycle is portrayed and the measured cadence of the language in which the violence of nature is expressed are alien to modern ears. That is why the book will appear quite dull to many readers, as it did at first to this reviewer. And there are dull parts. But in a work of this magnitude, that much can be endured.

A note of quiet gratitude and admiration should be extended to the publishers for daring to illustrate the front cover of a historical novel with a water mill.

SERGE HUGHES.

The Story of the Abbey Theatre. Peter Kavanagh. Devin-Adair. $4.50.

THE quarrels, convulsions and riots which attended the growth of Ireland's Abbey Theatre might have made exciting popular reading. Or, tackling the material another way, some explanation of the Abbey's appearance and survival as a national repertory theatre in an age hostile to both the national and the repertory principles might have made a valuable serious study. Mr. Kavanagh has given us neither. His book reads a good bit like an MA thesis; it is sketchy, arbitrarily limited, and written as though the author were intent on completing the assignment rather than illuminating the subject. Like the indifferent student, he tends to throw in the information he has got, simply because he has got it, and to neglect equally interesting and equally important information which might have required a little digging —though not much — and without which the picture is strangely lopsided.

Coming upon the great opening nights at the Abbey, he is more likely to tell us who was in the audience than who was on the stage. Or he will inform us that Yeats was daring and determined enough to follow up one controversial production with another still more controversial. He then gives us the name of the second play. But he never does tell us anything about the play, or what was in it that was so controversial, which omission limits the reader's interest and understanding considerably. Again, he recounts the arrival and

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the defection of the Fays, but because he will not stop a moment to characterize them, we are unable to grasp the meaning of their relation to and break with the Abbey. Mr. Kavanagh gives the impression of not being very much interested in the plays, which were the greatest of the Abbey's contributions and which included at least one masterpiece in "The Playboy," and even less interested in the actors.

He is interested in only one man —Yeats—though this slanting of the story is not indicated in his title. Further, his interest in Yeats is uncritical. Granting that the Abbey would neither have been born nor endured without Yeats' passionate devotion, it is still possible and even necessary to examine the poet's various theories with some kind of objectivity. Yeats was quite right in asking for a poetic theatre; and quite wrong in his notion of what that theatre might be like. His vision was conditioned by his own talents, which were lyrical rather than dramatic, allegorical rather than specific. It was no accident that the Abbey's great work came from Synge in the form of peasant drama, but Mr. Kavanagh so little understands this important reversal that he can only record Yeats' sorrow over it, and implicitly agree. If he never does get hold of the actual nature of the Abbey's success it is because it does not occur to him that Yeats has somewhere failed.

WALTER KERR.

Noble Essences. Osbert Sitwell. Atlantic-Little, Brown. $4.50.

WIDENING out from his imperishably delightful family, Sir Osbert in this fifth volume shares also his friends with whomever will read about them. He has such a green finger for friends: several of those he lovingly describes I also knew, and cannot imagine how he coaxed from them the delight they gave him, which he conveys from them to his readers. Sir Edmund Gosse, so fortunate because he always caught his colds in the drafty corridors of the House of Lords instead of at bus stops or in subway stations, is shown magnificently vilifying Ezra Pound. Pound had been rude about the Rosettis. "Sir, you are uneducated," thundered Gosse, and added, "in final and fatal exposition of the American poet's character, 'when he arrived, he presumed to push past Parker [the butler].'" When I met Gosse, I saw only an aging, professorial person in galoshes (unworn in England).

How catholic are Sir Osbert's tastes! Who but he could have liked both Arnold Bennett and Rex Whistler; both Wilfred Owen and W. H. Davies? Perhaps the nicest thing in this enchanting book is the account of Mrs. Gordon Woodhouse playing her clavichord to Bernard Shaw and Sir Osbert in the war, during the blitz. The perfection of the three civilized people, contrasting

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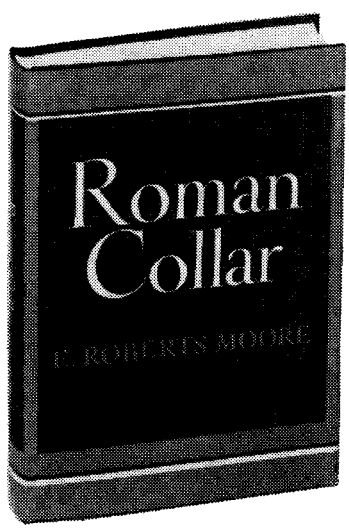

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with blackout and bombs, is a distillation of whatever it is has enabled humankind to survive mastodons and mammoths.

ANNE FREMANTLE.

Redemption. Francis Stuart. Devin-Adair. $3.

THE author of this book was born in Australia, educated at an English school, spent his early years in Ireland where he was a charter member of the Irish Academy of Letters, taught in Germany during the war, and now lives in Paris. A man of many places, and, apparently, of many experiences, he has been impelled to instil a credo in this novel, a credo which some readers may consider eccentric.

That this is a serious effort is clear from Stuart's own words about the book. He writes of "life-and-death" problems, of "absolute loneliness . . . the preliminary to all creative work." However, the creation is not up to the tenor of the inspiration, the artistry is not equal to the vision of earthly happiness, the precepts are not adequate, and the symbols are not credible.

Ezra Arrigho has come from Germany to Ireland without advising his wife of his return. He lives in a provincial hotel and encounters Father Mellowes, the priest's sister, Romilly, and Kavanagh who runs the fish market. Ezra is quickly identified as the opponent of convention, the enemy of the lukewarm. He is the strange man of the world who has seen fear and terror in a bomb shelter, has known a compulsive, uncomplicated love with a cellar companion, has felt the penetration of real life through his sufferings and those of others. He is another of the non-combatant characters of fiction who abruptly discover the true meaning of existence as a result of brutality and destruction.

Ezra's consequent distaste for orthodoxy and comfort involves him as a consoling companion of Kavanagh who has murdered his mistress, it leads him to a seduction of Romilly, and to desertion of his wife (in the

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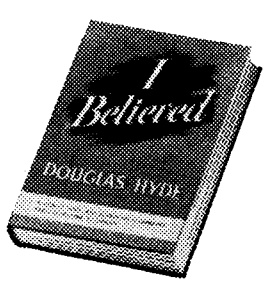

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story the wife is shown as the deserter). His influence causes Romilly to marry Kavanagh so she may visit him before his execution, it brings about a regeneration in Father Mellowes who throws off his old complacency, and it leads to the formation of a small community where all the sinners live in a bleak and unattractive manner.

Responsibility, a quality which is usually assumed to be among an artist's chief concerns, suffers severe shocks in novels which attack conventionalism. In this story Mr. Stuart is conventionally irresponsible in his portrayal of sin. He is also conventional in his tendency to be more efficient in denying than in affirming. He follows an old pattern when he makes the priest complacent, not the protagonist, and when he puts the cold, self-righteous look in his wife's eye but the healing hands on the arms of his mistress.

Because of these things, and because his writing is quite conventional, Mr. Stuart's book does not complete the redemption of his characters, of their situation, or of his project. His book needs more saving than he has given it.

GEORGE MILES.

Enthusiasm. R. A. Knox. Oxford. $6.

"PREACH the Gospel; put down Enthusiasm," said an eighteenth-century Anglican archbishop to one of his ordinants. It is this eighteenth-century prelate's horrified understanding of the word that we must keep in mind when reading Msgr. Knox's study. Though he closes his book with lines from *La Princess lointaine*—"la seule vertu est . . . l'enthousiasme!"—it is clear that for the most part Msgr. Knox regards it as a bad thing. And with reason. He begins with the Montanists, who felt the necessity of prophecy in an age which had grown out of prophecy; he goes on to the Donatists, who tried to revive martyrdom in an age which saw no persecutions. He next considers the various medieval forms of Manicheism, and concludes, against Gibbon, that the connection of the Albigensians with the earlier Paulicians is one of borrowing rather than descent. The Anabaptists, on the other hand, he considers to have definite and strong pre-Reformation roots; they were a source of some embarrassment to Luther when he sought them as allies. Had their attempted meeting of minds been successful, the whole color of Reformation spirituality would have been of a more "enthusiastic" hue than it was.

But all this is by way of preliminary to the main theme, which makes itself heard primarily in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with the two antithetical heresies of Jansenism and Quietism. To these, as to John Wesley and his movement, the bulk of the book is devoted; and in reading about them an impression is deepened that was only suggested

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in the earlier part of the book: the dominant part played in these upsurges of enthusiasm by women. Angélique Arnauld, Madame Guyon, and Selina, Countess of Huntington, are very like each other and like Maximilla—"noble and rich women," as Saint Jerome said of the last and of her companion Priscilla. There is, in fact, much of the feminine in all these brands of enthusiasm: the generally uninhibited sway of emotion over reason, of heart over head. The men involved in these sorry ventures —Saint Cyran, Molinos (not, of course, to be confused with the sixteenth-century Jesuit theologian of the "scientia media," Luis de Molina), Zinzendorf, Wesley—were all remarkable, but scarcely, with the possible exception of the last-named, great. Pascal and Fénelon might, from Msgr. Knox's presentation of them, be described as the most famous victims of enthusiasm: both, significantly, were in the thrall of masterful and determined females.

WHAT is the cause of these recurrent aberrations? "Basically," replies Msgr. Knox, "it is the revolt of Platonism against the Aristotelian *mise en scène* of traditional Christianity." It is a struggle between the soul's immediate approach to God Who reveals Himself interiorly and so makes syllogism and analogy unnecessary and that of philosopher or theologian who insists on God's being "known derivatively." Saint Augustine was the chief catalyst in this development. To him one's decision was based on a "balance of motives: sin was to be avoided only by the neutralizing attraction of conscious love for God" (this to all enthusiasts but the Quietists, who preserved a purer Platonism, a necessary accompaniment of the convert's "experience"). "Exaggerated now from this angle, now from that, Saint Augustine's theology has provided, ever since, the dogmatic background of revivalism." That some kind of authority is needed to establish a balance—for "traditional Christianity is a balance of doctrines, and not merely of doctrines but of emphases"—is Msgr. Knox's conclusion. And the

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unlovely picture he has been able to give of the convulsionaries of Herrnhut and Saint Médard is more than enough to prove it.

His story is concerned with personalities rather than movements. As such it should have a wide appeal, though for the average reader the appeal will be somewhat blunted by Msgr. Knox's annoying habit—which rather suggests intellectual snobbery—of leaving the point of most of his revealing anecdotes untranslated: especially annoying in a work that makes no pretensions to original scholarship.

ALBAN BAER.

The City of God. Books I-VII. Saint Augustine. Fathers of the Church, Inc. $5.

SAINT AUGUSTINE'S *De Civitate Dei* is, next to the *Confessions,* the best known work of that powerful thinker who began the line of the great medieval philosophers. As knowledge of Latin is regressing continuously in spite of all the good arguments made for its educational value, the public for an English version of such a work is steadily growing. An admirable enterprise called The Fathers of the Church, founded by Ludwig Schopp, and now edited by Roy Joseph Deferrari with the assistance of nine prominent specialists, offers the first seven books of this standard work as Volume VI of the writings of Saint Augustine. The editors intend to complete the work in further volumes. The translation by two Jesuit fathers, Demetrius B. Zema and Gerald G. Walsh, is very careful and most readable.

The stimulus for the work itself came, of course, from the sack of Rome by Alaric, an event that alarmed the whole Roman Empire after decades of false security. The work's rational criticism of the pagan religions is certainly no new feature; there were many precursors in the history of Christian apologetics. The originality of Augustine lies much more deeply in the positive desire to overcome the dark powers of evil and to point out the way for escape from the wreckage of a doomed world. In this, the great book has less importance for the history of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, than for the making of medieval Europe. It is a treasure house of Christian wisdom on which philosophers and politicians draw to this day.

ETIENNE GILSON, the eminent French historian of philosophy, now at the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies in Toronto, has contributed a foreword which discusses Saint Augustine's book in connection with the ideal of a world society that haunts the secular mind in our day.

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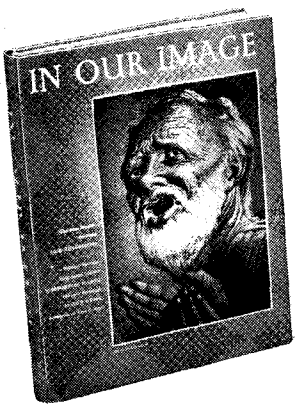

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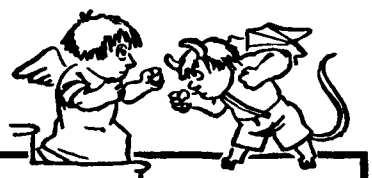

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historian, Edward Gibbon), Saint Augustine develops the ideals of the society of God, based on justice, concord and faith. In a time shaken by insecurity like our own, Augustine demonstrated that only a transcendental society is able to free man from fear and tribulation and to give him peace and beauty. The whole philosophy of Augustine is the glorification of Love that unites men in the same ultimate goal; the greatest sin, to him, is the love and pride of the Ego. Gilson confesses his doubt that any universal society is possible without the love of the same supernatural good. MAX FISCHER.

Goethe and the Modern Age. The 1949 International Convocation at Aspen, Colorado. Edited by Arnold Bergstraesser. Henry Regnery. $5.

THE publisher of this report has made a record during the last few years of publishing several bitter and unjust books which helped a great deal to create that upside-down picture of facts which is characteristic not only of the Maliks, but also of that strange fringe of citizens who have felt and said that if Hitler himself was not right, we were at least under grave suspicion of being wrong. It is therefore quite a relief to see a positive contribution to the rehabilitation of the German nation coming from this source: a handsome, well-printed apotheosis of Goethe. It is not my task to spread myself as to the merits of the Aspen convocation, the details of its program and the advertising connected with it. I am only concerned with the book and its contents.

If there were less of it, it would mean more; unless this work is intended for the vast libraries of "Goetheania" in learned institutions. The speakers, coming from all climes, show a knowledge of Goethe and his works which puts me, for one, to shame. And since almost all of them are bright stars in the sky of literature, and experts in literary vivisection, I am not up to analyzing the faults in the little and large memorial temples they have built to the

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master with his own brick. I certainly enjoyed the spirited and cavalier paper of Ludwig Lewisohn, and his daring attempts to show us that he is able to give us a true Goethe in English. As far as I am concerned, he indeed succeeds more than the earliest attempts which he quotes to support his point. He of course runs into many contrary statements by great speakers on the same program—and that adds a bit of spice to the sometimes large, ponderous and all-too-important papers.

I laid the book down, puzzled. What was Goethe's faith? I had labeled him all my life as the author of the famous: "He who has no art, should have religion;" as the great, serene, Olympic pagan, the perfect natural man, innocent of the supernatural in its Christian sense. But Ernst Simon's profound and shrewd paper blurs this black and white pattern and gives it shades and transitions. He finally fits him into the long line of assuredly superior spirits who say with him, "The Koran says God has endowed every people with a prophet speaking its own language" —a statement which could hardly have meant what Goethe thought it did, but which is, in Goethe's version, what usually is called religious relativism. In other words, Goethe made no original answer whatsoever to the question: Who is God?

Even after Aspen, he remains a phenomenon, a rare and great person, a symbol of significance; but no Saint Augustine will be touched to the quick by him, nor will he ever breed heresies or schisms of his message. He is the supreme intellectual, and may God vest his noble soul with the flowing light of His countenance.

H. A. REINHOLD.

The Nymph and the Lamp. Thomas H. Raddall. Little, Brown. $3.

THIS is a simple, rather predictable story which gains its interest from the locale in which it is laid. Wherever the Canadian countryside or the barren stretches of Marina Island are described the book takes on a stature that is tangential to the narrative but not a part of it.

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Mr. Raddall has a strong feeling for the Canadian landscape. However it is the brooding force of a cold sea and a long, cold winter ahead that dominates and, to a degree, forms the story. Nature is the ruling factor on Marina Island and this story is an apt illustration of how

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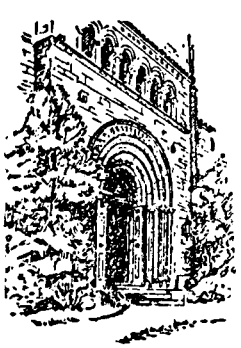

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